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ABSTRACT

Ways in which various individual, social, and organizational factors influenced the participation of faculty in the calendar revisions were studied at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. It was theorized that environmental uncertainty and organizational pressure for change would serve as primary motivating forces for participation. These proposed influences were measured by the discrepancy between actual and desired performance, the "performance gap." A random sample of 100 faculty, stratified by college and participation, was selected for examination by interviews and questionnaires. The primary findings support the hypothesis that the presence of a performance gap serves to mediate the influence of attitudinal, individual, and organizational factors affecting participation. The predictive capacity of categories was affected by the degree of environmental uncertainty: the best predictor category for the total sample was individual factors, but organizational factors was the best predictor category for respondents with high performance gap. Any support system designed to encourage faculty participation in a comprehensive, university-wide innovation must take into consideration the innovation and incentive system as perceived by individual faculty. More specifically, the design must address the delicate balance between motivation and perceived rewards, costs, and consequences. (SW)

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EVALUATING ACADEMIC CHANGE

Session 17

UNIVERSITY SUPPORT SYSTEMS NECESSARY TO IMPLEMENT INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE: FACULTY SUPPORT SYSTEMS*

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FACULTY SUPPORT SYSTEMS:

Adoption of a program by an organization does not necessarily mean that it will be instituted or implemented at the individual level, since the interaction of individual and organizational factors can combine so has to hinder or facilitate the organizational innovation effort. Participation in (or lack of participation in) an organizational innovation during an implementation effort may reflect more the perceived balance between motivation and the obstacles and resources connected with the innovation than it reflects individual or collective commitment to the goals and values of the innovation.

It is especially difficult for a university to adopt a major institutional change that requires modifications in the behavior of faculty members. Previous research has shown that the reactions of

individuals to major institutional change may be tempered by the degree of environmental uncertainty. In such instances, organizational pressure for change may enhance the relative advantage of the innovation and, hence, affect the rate of participation. I found that perceived organizational pressure did make a difference in my study of how various individual, social, and organizational factors influenced the participation of faculty in the calendar revisions at University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. The concern for the study was not to identify why faculty participated in a specific innovation activity, but rather to develop some insights into the interaction of forces that influenced their participation.

For the purposes of the study it was theorized that environmental uncertainty and organizational pressure for change as measured by performance gap or the discrepancy between actual and desired performance would serve as a primary motivating force for participation. Performance gap was measured by the relative change over a two-year period in departmental student credit hour production and costs, number of graduates, and faculty loads. It was hypothesized that the impact of attitudinal, individual, and organizational factors on faculty participation would be mediated by the presence of a performance gap. Moreover, it was hypothesized that in those cases where there was high environmental uncertainty, organizational factors would be most important in explaining participation. A random sample of 100 faculty, stratified by college and participation, was selected for examination by interviews and questionnaires.

The primary findings supported the hypothesis that the presence of a performance gap serves to mediate the influence of attitudinal, individual, and organizational factors affecting participation. The existence of a performance gap intensified associations where they existed. The predictive capacity of categories also was affected by the degree of environmental uncertainty. The best predictor category for the total sample was individual factors. But organizational factors was the best predictor category for respondents with high performance gap. The organizational pressure of being in an area of high environmental uncertainty enhanced the relative advantage of the innovation and, hence, affected the rate of participation.

However, the pressure of environmental uncertainty alone cannot induce participation. Certain attributes of individual faculty members, as well as organizational factors, may serve to further facilitate participation. The decision to innovate will have a differential effect on members of the organization. One individual may have greater motivation than another to participate in the innovation. Others may be seriously disadvantaged by the decision to innovate. The differential effect may vary from differences in philosophies and value systems to differences in the allocation of organizational resources. Certain dislocations in faculty relationships may be inherent in the innovation. For instance, a switch to a reward system which emphasizes institutional (curricular) development over professional (scholarly) development has the potential to disrupt patterns.

Any support system designed to facilitate faculty involvement in a university innovation must address this complex relationship of conflicts, obstacles, and resources. The innovation design at UW-O took into consideration some of these problems. The alternative calendar at UW-O represented a major institutional innovation because it introduced a new and deliberate change in structural relationships and patterns in the University.

The innovative calendar plan incorporated two major components. First, it involved a shift in the calendar schedule from a traditional 17-week academic term with eight-week summer sessions to a 14-week academic term and optional academic terms of seven-week, three-week, and four-week (summer) periods. Thus, the new alternative calendar permitted the co-existence of both traditional and innovative modular course patterns. Likewise, faculty teaching responsibilities could be scheduled in any of the time periods to reflect individual preferences and institutional needs and to provide "free time" for faculty.

The second major component of the innovation involved the introduction of a faculty development program which committed institutional funds for professional growth and renewal. The program consisted of four areas: curriculum development awards; research project awards; faculty colleges and inservice programs; and academic institutes. The Faculty Development Program uses an incentive grant model. Faculty Awards are distributed on a competitive basis to individual faculty or groups of faculty members and provide salary compensation and other supplemental support for projects which were performed outside of

regular contractual employment periods. Consultants and short-term visiting professors also may be supported through the program.

The support system, developed to encourage faculty participation in both the curricular revisions and the Faculty Development Program, incorporated three major dimensions: it was individual based--the program relied heavily on individual faculty strengths and interests; it was congruent with academic norms and mores--the competitive nature of the faculty development program award system encouraged initiative and relied on peer evaluation criteria; it was perceived as having direct and indirect benefits to the individual as well as to the organization; and it was base budgeted on an institution-wide basis and, thus, had a continuing resource base.

Many theorists have concluded that one of the more crucial set of variables associated with the innovative behavior of faculty is the incentive system as perceived by individual faculty. An innovation must be perceived as having distinctive value for the individuals involved in it or affected by it, if it is to be attempted, adopted and continued. At the same time, any system established to support faculty involvement must be reasonably consistent with institutional traditions, practices and purposes.

Incentives, as perceived by faculty, were very critical in the UW-O study. Organizational incentives that affected the individual, coupled with perceived intrinsic pressure for improvement of professional skills and expertise and a favorable attitude toward the innovation, were

among the most salient factors in the study. The persistent importance of the role of individual incentives supported the contention that perceived benefits of an innovation based either on the attributes of the innovation or the direct benefits to the individual are a crucial element in the behavioral use of an innovation by faculty. Regardless of the level of agreement with the innovation's goals, the greater the level of perceived incentives, the higher the rate of participation. This can be explained in part by the fact that incentives and rewards of the calendar innovation were explicitly tied to participation. The rewards served in the capacity of both incentives and sanctions. There were some spin-off effects which benefited all, whether or not a faculty member actively participated. (For instance, by following the traditional fourteen-week schedule one would automatically get free time during the three-week interim.) But for the most part, rewards and incentives were mutually exclusive of the calendar innovation. Those faculty who did not participate were penalized in the sense that they did not receive any of the direct rewards associated with the calendar innovation.

However, a second and more important implication is that the individual incentives served multiple purposes. The attainment of individually valued rewards was in part contributory to the accomplishment, directly or indirectly, of organizational goals. Even though the possibility of accomplishing organizational objectives was not sufficient to induce participation, they were to some degree achieved if faculty participated. For instance, by offering a three-week course,

an individual could theoretically increase the flexibility of his/her schedule and at the same time increase the flexibility of options available to students. Receipt of CAS for a research proposal provided additional income for the recipient but also assisted the faculty member in increasing his/her expertise and thus indirectly influenced the level of competence of the faculty at UW-O. Individual incentives also served to meet certain intrinsic needs of faculty. Perceived qualitative stress or the felt need to improve self emerged as an important factor in participation. In the same way, even in units with high environmental uncertainty, the satisfaction of professional needs was more important than meeting programmatic needs.

Any support system designed to encourage faculty participation in a comprehensive, university-wide innovation must take into consideration the innovation and incentive system as perceived by individual faculty. More specifically, the design must address the delicate balance between motivation and perceived rewards, costs, and consequences.